

Interview with John Ullman

in Eastham, Massachusetts

August 5, 1989

By Don Sparrow

DS: This is an oral history interview being conducted for the Eastham Historical Society. Don Sparrow is the interviewer and John Ullman is being interviewed. John is Executive Editor of The Cape Codder and has been associated with Eastham all of his life. We're going to let him tell you about his career before and after coming to live full-time in Eastham. The date is August 5 and we're in the Sparrow house on Nauset Road in Eastham.

JU: The period that I can discuss would run from about 1913 into the twenties. I was born in 1905 and by 1913 I was going on toward eight and at this point spending all my summers in Eastham. I had walked around every pond and through every pine woods and over every meadow and I knew the town very well.

But my relationship to Eastham goes back a bit farther than that. My grandfather was Freeman Cobb Hatch and he was born on what is now called Samoset Road in the square white house now

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occupied by Louise Meservey, but originally occupied by the Walter Hatches. He [Freeman] was my mother's father.

My father's mother was born just down the road from here, where Bud and Millie Cummings live. Her name was Abigail Hatch Thompson. So my mother's father and my father's mother were both born in Eastham and this is where we came whenever we had time off.

What I can recall about Eastham, that people looking at it now wouldn't recognize, is the absence of trees. And where we came to was a cottage called Kinnikinnik. It was a year around house, and I can date it for you fairly closely, because when Jemima (Mimie) Clark died, my grandfather, Freeman Hatch, who was her nephew, had bought it from her, with the right to live in it the rest of her life, and they went in to set it up, to move into themselves, and found on the shelf of a closet a pigskin covered account book that started with shillings and pence and shifted over to dollars and cents, which will give you a fairly good dating of how old Kinnikinnik actually was.

DS: You're telling me that shillings and pence were used as a--

JU: Before we became a dollar and cents country we were using shillings and pence.

DS: Was that before the Revolution?

JU: Would be. Or about that time. I think it was shortly after the Revolution it was changed. So anybody who knows when we made the shift will have an idea of when Kinnikinnik was being occupied. And Mimie Clark, Jemima Clark, after whom Mimie's Pond was named, lived there until she died and then Freeman and his wife, Hattie Peebles Hatch, moved into it. And when we came to the Cape summers, we moved in with my mother's grandfather. There were three generations there, my father off working somewhere.

So I had a native Eastham boy, who was a fisherman and a hunter, as my guide and director, and he showed me where to fish and how to fish and what to do.

DS: Can I ask a question?

JU: You may indeed any time.

DS: You had brothers and sisters?

JU: I had a brother named Harrison, who was born in Kinnikinnik and an older sister, who was born as I was in Yonkers, New York, and a younger sister, still living, who was born in Hartford.

DS: So you played with them as a boy?

JU: That's right.

DS: Who were some of the other playmates you had?

JU: Well, the only other playmates that I can recall were girls, and they were Ina and Virginia Nickerson, who lived down the road in Almond and Eva Nickerson's house. Kinnikinnik was the base, the belly of the Eastham occupation. We eventually bought it, when my father had a brief spurt of prosperity in the twenties, and owned it for two or three years and built the garage that's there now. And I think we ought to put on the record the tennis court that was built down in back, between the house and the pond. I don't know whether I've told you about this, but Fulcher was the handyman of the time. He had the mower, the horse and the mower, that could take down the hay in the front yard.

DS: Which Fulcher was this?

JU: Probably John. And we left one year and my father [Harry Hatch Ullman] called him over and said, "Do you know how to build a tennis court?"

"Sure do. Built a lot of them."

And Father said, "Well, down there on the level, just short of the pond, would be a nice place. Would you like to build a tennis court?"

He said he would and he did and when we came down the next year with our rackets ready we found that he had not only built a very carefully constructed tennis court, but had built chicken

wire three levels up, so that the balls wouldn't go into the pond. Flush with the lines, so that you couldn't run back anywhere. [Laughter] Later we measured the size of it and found that it wasn't exact, and he said, well, I can make them any size you want.

But Kinnikinnik was where we lived and traveled to by either horse or Model-T, where my mother [Edna Hatch] showed some visiting men who had been drinking too much and practicing with a rifle, that she could shoot too. She saw the men shooting at a tin can in a tree, over what is now Samoset Road. In those days it was just a dirt road and very little traffic on it, so they fired 22's across it. My mother said, "Can I take a shot?" And one of the men said, "Sure." And he went down to the tree they were using and put his new Dunhill pipe up for a target. My mother said, "Are you sure?" He said, "Yes." So she smashed the Dunhill pipe and handed him back the rifle.

In those days it was not called Samoset Road. It was called the West Shore Road.

DS: Excuse me. This gentleman thought that your mother was such a poor shot, she couldn't possibly hit it?

JU: She was a woman. No way she could hit anything she aimed at.

DS: So he was taking a chance?

JU: It wasn't a chance at all. He just put that up to show how incompetent she'd be. But she was brought up down here too. There was a time when my grandfather was renting boats and one of the boats he rented was a dory. And two men came down and went fishing on Great Pond and they walked up to the house afterwards to pay for it, and my grandfather said, "Where's the boat?"

"Oh, it's too windy. We couldn't row it across. It's over on the other shore."

And my mother was there. She was a very slim person in those days. My grandfather said, "Anybody could row the boat. My daughter could row the boat over."

My mother walked around the pond and got in the dory and rowed it across, and as she was pulling it up on the bank, she saw the men handing money to my grandfather, who had wagered that a ninety-five pound woman could row a boat that two big men could not. She was a Cape Cod girl herself.

The road to the west shore was a sandtrack until I guess pretty close to the twenties, when they covered it with tar, and covering it with tar created the possibility, when you walked up to George Clark's store, of picking a little shiny bubble of tar from the road and chewing it. It tasted awful, but it looked as if it was going to taste good, and you never did learn that it wasn't worth chewing.

DS: The same thing was true of the pitch pine from the trees.

JU: Yes.

DS: That looked so wonderful.

JU: Looks delicious.

DS: And it smells so good, but--

JU: You never learn not to try it. Now the three Clarks, George and Herbert and Helen, lived in a house, an old farmhouse, just across the road approximately from where the yellow house is now, the Ina/Virginia house. She kept house. Herbert ran the asparagus bed, and George kept the general store, which was up-- now it's a bicycle path, then it was railroad tracks, and it was on, of course, the west side of the railroad tracks.

DS: Did you know that the road that went in back of that was called Know Nothing Road?

JU: No, I didn't, but it doesn't surprise me. George Clark, rest his soul, mumbled to himself a lot and was not considered the sharpest sort of man. There's a legend goes with it. In those days there was a turnout for horses on all the ponds along side roads. They've disappeared now, but the one on Mimie's Pond was right off the end of Great Pond Road. And what you did was drive your horse down through a little crack into the pond, let the horse drink, and put him up again. And as he made his rounds, this is what George did, and eventually he got a Model-T

of his own, and it is said, and I cannot prove it, that he would drive the Model-T in there and wait for it to drink a little while and then he would drive out again. [Laughter] But I do know that he was also the postmaster, and when the mail was delivered, the store in which the postoffice was held was closed for business. He wouldn't sell anything until the mail had been sorted and delivered.

DS: Once a day?

JU: This was once a day. Nothing coming up from Provincetown had any mail on it, but the down train, of course, had mail, and in the summer there were summer people down here, or beginning to be, and they all expected mail and some of them expected checks. But all of the mail was sorted A, B, C and D, until the last letter was sorted, and then it was pulled out again, A, B, C and D, and he called out the names. And Atwood got his early and Ullman got his late.

He had a bowl in which Tootsie Rolls were placed in quantity. They were a penny apiece. A Tootsie Roll was a chewy sort of candy about the thickness of a pencil and about two inches in length, wrapped in paper. And many people took their three and four and five cent change out of the Tootsie Rolls. My father loved it. He arrived there one day and found the bowl empty and said to George, "When you gonna get some Tootsie Rolls?"

"Ain't."

"Why not?"

"Can't keep them in stock."

And this, of course, was a good reason for a storekeeper not to stock them.

DS: You're probably going to get into this, but what other things did he handle? It was a general store. He handled everything?

JU: It was a general store. He had rubber boots and bread. He had kerosene and butter. He had lemons. My mother sent me up from Kinnikinnik one day. There were a lot of people around on a Sunday and she was going to make lemonade, so she sent me up for a dozen lemons.

George said, "A dozen? That's too many. What does she want them for?"

"She wants to make lemonade. Got a lot of people."

"Six is enough." And he gave them to me. And I said, "But there are a lot of people."

"Add water," said he. And six lemons were all he would sell me. He was eccentric and such, and he was right across the railroad tracks from another one by the name of Cavalier Robbins.

DS: I remember Cavalier Robbins.

JU: Do you remember Cavalier Robbins? Then you probably

remember that when the train came in, Cavalier went to the freight end, the express end of the train to take the suitcases and the trunks out. And it didn't make any difference how big the trunk was, long and thin, elderly Cavalier Robbins hauled the trunk out onto his shoulder, walked out, found who it belonged to, and said, "Where do you want it?" And carried it to his car or his cart. He was the express agent and he and George Clark I think were about the same age. "

I remember Herb Clark only vaguely, because I bunched asparagus as a kid, saving the culls and the crooks and so on, which I put in a separate basket, and that was my pay. And all through the asparagus season, asparagus cooked in milk and butter was pretty apt to be a major meal at our house.

DS: My mother saved the tips, the broken tips. Of course you can't sell them. So that was our evening meal, asparagus tips on toast. Wow!

JU: Oh yes, indeed, and it's gone now. It's all gone.

DS: But he sold pickles in a barrel?

JU: Oh, yes. Bread was in a bin and it was unwrapped, of course. You'd reach in and squeeze the various loafs till you found one that felt fresh. And I remember asking George if the bread was fresh. He said, "Fresh? Of course it's fresh. Fresh till it's gone."

DS: I don't know if you knew this, but my father bought George Clark's store in 1924.

JU: Did he really? Daniel?

DS: Daniel Sparrow. And the next day it burned down. You know it burned in 1924?

JU: Yes. Was that when it burned down?

DS: It burned right after my father bought it and my father hadn't gotten any insurance and he lost everything. And he had four of us. We ranged from one to five years old and here he was with four little kids and he lost a bundle.

JU: Wiped out. He was a bad luck man anyway, wasn't he?

DS: In many ways, yes.

JU: What happened to his head?

DS: He had a brain tumor, which-- we figured that he had it at least in 1928, and Dr. Bell was treating him for sinus, and he had excruciating headaches. You can imagine what it did to his personality. But we didn't learn that he had it. It was a benign tumor and we didn't learn till 1941 that it existed. And

then they operated and they had to remove just about all of his frontal lobe. They never put the piece of skull back in, as you recall. I guess they didn't expect him to live. And he could massage his brain, you know.

JU: My sister died of the same thing and they were treating her for some kind of headache, till it was too late to do anything about it.

DS: There's another little story. Mr. Winslow-- I think it was Herbert Winslow. You remember the two Winslow brothers?

JU: Yes, I do.

DS: My father took Herbert down to the beach on gunning parties and such, and Herbert came to him and said, "How much did you lose, Dan?" Let's say it was five thousand dollars. And he wrote him a check for five thousand dollars and said, "Pay me back when you can."

JU: How wonderful.

DS: I think it probably took my father a couple of years, but he did it.

JU: A lot of that happened in those days. The people that came down-- my grandfather was building some of the first summer

cottages specifically for rental purposes, along the south shore of Great Pond, and the people who came down were largely academians, people who went off the payroll in June and came back in September. So they wanted an inexpensive place to stay. And I can remember that my grandfather charged two hundred dollars, come any time until the first of August, and two hundred dollars to stay any time until we wanted to shut the place up in the fall. And for this they would come down, the kids out of school, they off the payroll, and eat the shellfish and eat the fish. These were the people that we knew as friends.

My grandfather built Keewaydin, the big square house up on the top of the hill, and moved to that, when my father bought Kinnikinnik and we moved in there for the summers. But in between Freeman built two cottages. They all started with K and all of the names were Indian and all of the Indian names came out of "Hiawatha". My grandmother did that. Because in those days the summer places very frequently had little boards on the slant front roof with the name on it, and one of them was the Horton house on Samoset Road, and you would stand there and watch a car slow down and summer people look at it and try to pronounce Hatetoquitit. That's a nice Indian--

DS: How's that again?

JU: Hate to quit it. All one word. And they were trying to pronounce this Indian name, which amused us very much.

I've got the general store and the railroad station to you

and Cavalier Robbins all right.

DS: Yes. My memory of Cavalier is the same as yours. He was a little wizened up man with white hair in my memory and he apparently was always very frail.

JU: Didn't look like he could lift a bucket, but he slung the trunks and valises around.

My grandfather did a lot of hunting. He was a magnificent shot, as his brother Jim, the game warden, was. But he lived in Wollaston in the winter. He was a potato broker. And he would send a wire-- in those days you conversed by Western Union-- and he'd send a wire to Ormund Howes and he'd ask Ormund Howes if there were any ducks flying. And he got answers like this: ONE IN A FLOCK ONE IN A FLOCK BY AND BY TWO SINGLE ONES and SO LIGHT THEY DONT HARDLY COME DOWN AFTER YOU SHOOT THEM.

While he was still living in Kinnikinnik in the summers, my grandfather got a Florence wood stove and set it up in the living room, but the flue was in the dining room and there was a short partition between the two, and he had to get a stovepipe that came out of the dining room and around the partition and back to the Florence stove.

So he did his measurements and he went up to the tinsmith in Orleans and had the stovepipe made, and it looked like a worm in agony, and he had it in the back of his little pickup truck and as he was going by, he saw Ormund Howes, and he stopped. "Take a look what's in the back." Ormund Howes looked at this immense

stovepipe and said, "Gonna bend your smoke up some." That was Ormund Howes. But when he got to Kinnikinnik, it fitted and it worked.

But speaking of stoves, we lived by the stove in the kitchen in Kinnikinnik. It was an old Florence coal and wood burner stove, and on the back of it was a great big copper tank and that was where the hot water came from. The cold water came from a pump in the kitchen sink and it was a slate sink and you learned to pump and pump and pump until the little bit of rust got out of the water, till it tasted good.

DS: Did you have a can of water there to prime it?

JU: Priming, oh yes, you had that, and if you'd forgotten that, you could always take hot water out of the copper bowl and that would work just as well.

DS: What did you use for fuel? Was it pine or oak or-- ?

JU: We burned a lot of pine, because it was a very short chimney and we didn't care how much creosote got in it. It would burn off all right.

DS: We did the same thing, but we kept the stove so hot I think it vaporized all the pitch and creosote. We never had a chimney fire.

JU: We would have burned locust, but locust was so valuable for posts. It got harder and harder the longer it stayed in the water. All of our docks-- and we had six of them out onto the pond, we called them wharves-- we made with four or five-inch locust posts. You'd drive them in. You'd leave them in through the winter. The ice wouldn't bother them a bit. They were cast iron. They just got harder. They never rotted at all.

DS: It's amazing stuff.

JU: Incidentally, I don't know what has happened to our winters, but when I was down here the ice on Great Pond was thick enough to cut and we had an ice-house down in back of Kinnikinnik and that long rolling thing to bring the ice in all the way up to a third floor. And the layers of ice, which were a good two feet thick as I recall it, were separated by eel grass. There'd be a layer of hundred pound chunks of ice or fifty pound chunks of ice, then eel grass, another layer. And there was finally, up in the peak of that third floor, a little door that they have on barns and they put the last ice in there.

And my job, when I was down as a teenager, was to keep the iceboxes of the cottages full, and I would brush off all the eel grass I could get off--

DS: You'd have ice there all summer long?

JU: All summer long. It lasted right up until September.

DS: Why did you use eel grass?

JU: That was a good buffer and it was cheap and it was available and we'd go down and get it.

DS: Down to the West Shore?

JU: Yes. And the salt apparently wasn't a melting agent and it worked very well. So you knew what size the various refrigerators you were going to serve would take, so you'd wheel-barrow it up, take the ice tongs--which you don't see around any more--open the top, lift the ice in after you removed the various things, then stack the stuff around the ice and close the top again.

But you may have forgotten the icebox itself, which had at the very bottom a pan to catch the melted water, and just above that a place to put the milk. You put the milk in a big pan as you got it and waited for cream to form, and then you skimmed the cream off. Do you remember that?

DS: My father kept a cow or two and my mother would put it out in the pantry and let the cream rise overnight. Then you'd skim it off with a cream skimmer. You can't pour the stuff, you had to ladle it.

JU: No, you can't. Had to be skimmed, that's right. Later they

invented a thing that you could put in milk bottles, back before they homogenized. They'd dip it down and bring the cream up. But cream is long gone now, isn't it?

DS: Well, perhaps fortunately.

JU: I suppose so, although my grandfather ate his oatmeal in the morning with butter and heavy cream on it and he died at eighty-six approximately.

DS: We had cereal every morning, cereal with that heavy cream ladled over. Then we'd have bacon and the eggs fried in the bacon grease.

JU: Of course.

DS: And buttered hot toast.

JU: And pancakes and hot muffins and so on. Those were some breakfasts, weren't they? One of the things that served those breakfasts-- this is another thing you may have forgotten-- do you remember the fireless cooker? Every dining room of any substance on Cape Cod had what looked like a coffin sitting under the window. You'd lift the top. The whole top would come up on a hinge, and you'd find that it was very heavy, because it was insulated with lead, I believe, for a metal thing. And there were either three or four, depending on the size of your fireless

cookers, circular holes, at the bottom, of which each was a removable round piece of iron. That round piece of iron would be heated on your stove, dropped down into one of the circular tubes, a metal tube that it would just fit into, a hollow tube about a gallon capacity, and into that tube you'd put your oatmeal in this one, your bread dough in that one, and your baked beans in that one, close the thing and seal it, and in the morning it had been cooked. All of that stuff had been-- well, I drool, but the fireless cooker was a very important part.

DS: There's a very modern stove now, called an ^{Agas} ~~Arges~~ stove, which does essentially the same thing. They have some method of heating it, but it's a very low temperature and the thing stays hot all the time. It's almost cool to the touch, but inside it's hot enough so you can do just as you described. The latest thing. It costs five thousand dollars. [Laughter]

JU: And in those days it probably cost ten dollars. Everybody had one. And I don't know where they got to. I don't know where they disappeared to. I do know where all the antique pine furniture that my grandfather had disappeared to. He burned it. He bought brass bedsteads and had a bonfire down in back to get rid of the awful stuff.

DS: Doesn't it make you shudder?

JU: Of course that's what makes what survived worth so much.

Let me see, what else did we have? We had kerosene lamps, of course. What was the name of that special white mantel that--

DS: That was a Wellsbach Mantel.

JU: Wellsbach, that's right, and that's what I studied by or what I read "Frank Packard and the Grey Seal" by in those days, or Arthur Guyempy.

DS: Arthur Guyempy, he was the World War I guy.

JU: Yes, he was.

DS: "Over the Top"--

JU: "Over the top with the best of luck and give 'em hell". That was Arthur Guyempy and it was awful writing. I dipped into it recently. It was unbelievably bad, but it was fascinating then.

DS: Did you use the library a lot?

JU: Not a great deal, but the library used me. I had a lot of books and my grandmother got sick of them and gave them to the library. I think they've long since been sold by the library too. What did we do? I think we subscribed to some sort of a thing that would send us new books, and some of them were good

and some of them were Arthur Guyempy.

We've got Ormund Howes down here. Now Abigail, my father's mother-- which, of course, is how my father met my mother. My father was born in Manhattan, so how they got together is Eastham, of course, with their parents born here. Abigail was visiting us when we owned Kinnikinnik in the early twenties, Grandma Ullman, and Ed Penniman, who was her cousin, came to visit her. And I saw him only the once. I was down at Mimie's Pond and saw him walking down the road. In those days you walked from a place like the Penniman house to--

DS: Was this Captain Penniman?

JU: This was Captain Ed Penniman, and it looked to me like he weighed eighty pounds. He was a very small, very slim man and he walked with a cane until he saw me. When he saw me, his cane went up over his shoulder as though it were a musket and he walked by with his head in the air, and when I was apparently out of sight, he used the cane again. And he visited my grandmother, who was a little bit younger than he would have been, but not an awful lot. And I think that's the Ed Penniman who was the Captain of the NORTHERN LIGHT. Owned the Penniman house. No, it was Freeman Hatch who was the skipper of the NORTHERN LIGHT. The Freeman Hatch who was the skipper of the NORTHERN LIGHT was my grandfather's uncle.

DS: I have a great-grandmother Hatch, Elvira Hatch, and I'm sure

that back then they were cousins or something or other.

JU: I think the original Hatch was a James Sullivan Hatch, and he was fertile. There are a lot of Hatches around. I've got Abigail and Ed Penniman, Ed Penniman of the Penniman house. I think that was the right guy.

DS: This may not be a subject to get into, but he had a brother who was simple, and I've heard the story about him. Have you heard the story?

JU: No, but tell me.

DS: The story is that he sailed as a deckhand with his brother and he displeased the captain and the captain put him in a huge cask and fed him through the bunghole and I guess washed the cask out occasionally.

JU: "You say it one more time and I'll slap you in the barrel and feed you through the bung."

DS: Yes. And the poor man was kept in this for the duration of the voyage and he was never right after that, as you can imagine why.

JU: That's one story. I wrote a similar story in the Cape Codder. The way I heard it, Captain Penniman was a cabin boy on

a clipper ship, and being an Eastham boy he gave the captain a lot of sass, he talked back. And the captain-- it was a two-year voyage and he got sick and tired of beating up the coast-- "one more time and I'll clap you in the barrel and feed you through the bung," which he did. And Penniman took him to Admiralty Court, because he was in there for two weeks and of course looked very pasty-faced. Wasn't anything the matter with him. And he won enough to be half-owner of the clipper ship when he went out, and that's how he became a clipper ship owner.

DS: I'll be darned. I never heard that story. That's great. That's how he learned how to discipline his brother.

JU: There you go. Now let's see what I have. I have the ice house and the tongs and the iceboxes and the milk and the cream and the weir. There was a weir off First Encounter Beach, the west shore, when I was a boy.

DS: This is something I did not experience. I know you've talked about a lot, but go ahead, I'd love to hear more about them.

JU: Well, the man who owned the weir, in my memory, was a man named Bill Nickerson. But Mim Deschamps, who is Winnie Knowles's daughter and Addie Nickerson's granddaughter, doesn't remember Bill Nickerson. Nevertheless, if that was his name, he owned the ice house on Ice House Pond, and Ice House Pond is that little

cut-off tip of Long Pond between the bicycle path and Samoset Road. And the ice house was there and that's where he barreled and iced the fish from the weir and then took it up to Cavalier Robbins to put on the up train.

SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE:

JU: Well, whoever it was that owned the weir-- and I think it was Bill Nickerson-- would drive the old blue Eastham cart and the horse down the road and about twice a year I'd get up my nerve and run alongside and jump up and sit beside him. The invitation was that he didn't push me off. I was a nuisance, but I kept my mouth shut.

And we'd go out over the low tide flats to the weir and with pitchfork and a big hoop net he'd scoop up what there was and fill the back flapping with fish. The fish were flounder, mackerel, bluefish, probably stripers in those days.

But every once in a while we'd go out there and when we were about halfway out, he would begin to swear. I started to say on the other side of the tape that he was a man who had only one adjective and it would be bleeped in any kind of conversation. And he would say, the bleeping horse mackerel have gotten into my weir. They were big torpedoes and they could back up and go through these hard nets and leave a triangular tear, and then, of course, his entire catch would swim out to sea.

DS: A horse mackerel is a big mackerel?

JU: A horse mackerel is a tuna, but in those days it was a horse mackerel. It was worth about six cents a pound for cat food and not fit for human consumption. And so he'd pitchfork a couple of these hundred pounders up into his cart and that would be it, and if he had two hundred pounds, he had two hundred pounds times six cents, and that was his catch for the day.

But long after the weirs were down, they discovered that a horse mackerel was actually a tuna and was fit for human consumption and the price changed.

He would drive back and on the way back he'd say, "Ask your bleepin' mother if she wants a couple of bleepin' bluefish." And he'd throw them on the lawn on the way by.

But I would stay with him all the way to the ice house, to watch him pack them and ice them and so on. So that when I caught yellow perch to send to the commission merchants or when I caught eels to send to the commission merchants, he would let me have a couple of old kegs he wasn't using and he'd let me have some crushed ice to pack. And I sent them to Shattuck & Jones and I assume that I got that name from Bill Nickerson himself, who was sending to them. And in the fullness of time back would come a check for \$3.67, \$4.82 and so on, and this was real money in my day. I was beginning to buy postage stamps by that time.

DS: You bunched asparagus and you were paid?

JU: Yes. I used the treadle and bunched it. And I was paid

with asparagus, because I was ten or twelve years old.

DS: Did you ever cut asparagus?

JU: Never cut it. I don't believe I could have lasted a whole length, because it's a bend-over job, isn't it?

DS: God, yes. If I can tell a quick story--

JU: Yes, do.

DS: When the beds got old, twenty-five years old, and they were producing just small stuff, my father would turn over the beds to us kids and so we'd become entrepreneurs. We'd cut the asparagus, we'd bring it in, we'd bunch it, and we'd buy crates, put the crates together and we'd ship it to Boston.

JU: To commission merchants?

DS: To commission merchants. I remember Colley Wood and Winn Ricker were two. You mentioned getting checks for \$2.32, and if there was a nickel change in the price, you know, we'd go to the one that gave us the higher price.

JU: Sure you would.

DS: That was great experience.

JU: Yes, it was. It was a lot of fun. Not only was it fun, it created another type of situation. My grandfather decided that while he was waiting for the potatoes-- he was a potato broker-- and while he was waiting for Aroostock County to produce its potatoes, he'd summer down here and he'd experiment with various gardens. And up on what was then called the Wareham farm, that rectangle between the bicycle path, Samoset Road, and Great Pond Road that was dry, he tilled and planted Rocky Ford melons. And that was the year that it didn't rain. As far as I know, it rained nowhere on earth. It was just plain beautiful one day after another.

But we could water them because we were surrounded by ponds. So my grandfather put washtubs and buckets and so on in his truck and we'd fill the buckets with water and we'd jounce over the ruts up there and then we'd fill the watering cans. Back and forth. So we watered those melons. We got a beautiful job. And we produced some of the most delicious Rocky Fords you ever saw-- three days after Labor Day, and the A&P would not take ten. [Laughter] We had a truckload of them.

DS: I know after Labor Day everything died.

JU: Oh, yes, died dead. We also had another experimental farm. He planted summer squash alongside the melons, and he knew that there was a squash bug that was a threat to summer squash and he decided to outwit them. So he drove stakes in the ground all the

way around this big monstrous plot of summer squash, ran wire across the tops, and then did cheesecloth over the top, and on the ground was bricks, to make sure nothing could crawl through. And when it was time for summer squash to be harvested, we ripped off the cheesecloth and saw the most horrible skeletons you ever saw in your life. We had trapped the poor summer squash bugs in there and they had nothing to eat but our summer squash, and they destroyed it utterly.

But he was a great man for experimenting. He raised various kinds of potatoes, to see what their baking and boiling and frying capacities were, so that when he sold-- he sold by the carload-- he knew what to tell his clients to buy, what they could expect.

He was, I believe, the buying commissioner for the government, to supply spuds for GIs, doughboys, to peel during World War I.

Now let's see what else I have down here. How would you like to talk about a genuine clambake?

DS: I'd love to hear about a genuine clambake.

JU: Well, the genuine clambake is the one that you know about. You gathered your family and your friends, your equipment, and you went down below the Coast Guard Station, walking either left or right. We usually walked left a little way. And we built two massive fires and put big round boulders in the massive fires and then we dug pits. And we dug pits until the water

began to seep through. And when we were ready and the rocks were hot, we used the ice tongs to put the hot rocks down to hit the water and make steam, and inside we put corn in the shuck, we put lobster, we put crab, we put clams, we put quahogs. A whole ballygillhooley. We'd put potatoes, of course. We'd cover it up and put a stick there, so that we could find it after we were hungry enough. And we'd wait, as I recall it, three or four hours.

DS: You did not use seaweed?

JU: We used seaweed in between the various layers of these things, and this, of course, created the salty flavor that everything had. But the corn tasted of lobster and the lobster tasted of potato and the potato tasted of clams. It was just a most magnificent thing. And you began to eat it as the sun went down and the mosquitoes came up. You sat between the fires, hoping the smoke would keep the mosquitoes off.

And somebody with a guitar-- or in those days a ukulele-- would play and you'd sing, and you'd sing the old songs and sort of half go to sleep. But when you were through, if my grandfather was any part of this, you cleaned everything. You didn't leave a blade of cornhusk there. It was all carried away. It was all stuffed in burlap bags and was always brought back to the house.

And that brings me to the disposal of garbage, which you remember. Snow's, of course, and the Smith Brothers sold long-

handled shovels, and you dug a round pit, about two and a half to three feet across in your back yard, just as deep as the long-handled shovel would permit, and you dumped your garbage and your tin cans into that and covered it over with sand and covered it over with sand, and when it was full, if you were an eight, nine or ten year old boy, you went and dug another pit. And the backs of all the old houses here are dumps and anybody that wants to find any real old bottles or real old cans can find them in the back yard, because that's where our garbage went. And when we brought the detritus from a clambake on the shore, we dug holes and buried the stuff in the back yard. Of course we dug in sand, which made it very easy.

DS: Somebody asked me recently what we did with our garbage when I was growing up, and I couldn't remember. Then it finally occurred to me, we didn't have garbage. We had chickens, we had pigs. Everything was fed to the animals.

JU: Yes, everything.

DS: And we used damn few tin cans too.

JU: Very little that was left over. But, of course, we bought, we didn't have a farm, so we had stuff to bury and that's what happened to it.

DS: I've got two quick stories to add to your clambake. One is

that my wife's father worked for Nickerson and they had a clambake every year. Josh had a clambake for the employees and all their families. She was a little girl and she said the job of the little kids was to-- they had these little buckets, they'd go down to the ocean and fill them with water and they'd come back and throw it onto the clambake to add moisture and steam. So that's the way they kept the little kids busy, running back and forth.

JU: That would do it, but, of course, if you dug your pit deep enough, there was always water there on the hot stones, and the steam rose and rose and rose.

DS: That part I never heard. That's a wonderful story. There's another story. Shaw used to have clambakes annually. Labor Day. Big crowd down there.

JU: In back of the firehouse.

DS: Well, no, no, this was over by the--

JU: On the shore?

DS: The boathouse. Down by the Nauset marshes. And B. Loring Young-- you remember B. Loring Young-- always hankered to get invited to one of those clambakes and never made it. So one year he got a canoe and dressed up as an Indian in a breechclout and

had this proclamation, and he paddled around and he stood up in his canoe and read this proclamation. "The native welcome the white man and we are peaceful citizens." You know, the usual thing. And they were a little bit far gone in alcohol and they didn't think it was amusing and they threw stones at him and sunk his canoe. [Laughter]

JU: Sunk his canoe! Well, that's what a white man would do, drive the Indian off. Sure.

My grandfather used to take me out to Billingsgate a couple of times a year to dig for guilford. And I don't know if there's anybody living that knows what a guilford is. It's a steamer clam the size of your hand and Billingsgate had them. Almost as big as a sea clam.

DS: They're big fat ones.

JU: Yes. Well, we brought them back. We cleaned them. Peeled them. And my grandmother chopped them up and mixed with cornmeal and some herbs and spices and put them back in the shell and baked them. And those were the stuffed clams that you ate then. They weren't quahogs.

DS: Were they tough?

JU: No, not when you ground them up. This is why you ground them up. A quahog, a big quahog would be tough if you didn't

grind it.

DS: But these were just big clams then?

JU: They were monstrous big clams. They were awful big. What people don't know is that in Long Pond there is a yellow perch that will run anywhere from a pound and a half to two pounds, and if you fish there every day, you'll catch one perhaps in a season. It is as long as your forearm and it looks like a bass in size. It's a holdover from what yellow perch used to be, before they became eleven and twelve inches when you caught big ones.

DS: Well, that's the ones I caught. You know, yea big.

JU: Try one like that.

DS: Good eating!

JU: Oh, delicious. There's nothing to beat that.

[BRIEF INTERRUPTION WHILE RETA COMES IN]

JU: Speaking of good eating, of course, brings your father Dan back into it, because any time I got stuck in the sand with the Model-T, I'd walk from where it was-- usually the west shore-- to where he was, usually over by the cement barn. And he'd hop into

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his pickup, his truck, drive down, shovel it full of sand to give it some weight, haul me out. He'd never take money, but I discovered early on that he loved yellow perch. And so after he'd done this, he'd get a dozen dressed yellow perch and he would act as though I had done him a favor instead of-- but if he was eating, he'd wait until he was through eating, then he'd get in the truck and come and pull me out. And I think probably over the years he must have done this half a dozen times and never complained about it once.

DS: You probably have better memories of my father than I do, in the sense that this is before he had the brain problem, and he was quite a different person then.

JU: Yes, of course. Oh, he was a lovely man. But so was Rob and so was Annie and so was Nora.

DS: Rosie?

JU: And Rosie. Rosie lived with us, of course.

Let me see. Ducks. One of the things you don't see any more. You used to go down in October or November to the west shore and wait, and every forty-five minutes a great big black cloud of eiderducks would come by, and if it was a calm day they'd go all the way around to Provincetown and then head for the white cliffs. They'd keep circling around. They didn't want to cross land and they wouldn't cross until either night or a

heavy storm. If it was raining, they'd go across. But the crowds were so thick that they were knocking feathers off each other as they flew. And you'd look out on the Bay and you would see a raft of black ducks, six or seven acres in extent. There was no end to our resources. We could waste anything we wanted to in those days.

DS: They were good eating too, I bet?

JU: The eiderduck? No. It was kind of fishy. There are people who will cut their cheeks out, the breast, and fry that and waste the rest of the duck. But the black duck, of course, was the one the gunners came down here for. They shot piles of them around their ankles and I'm afraid some of them took their surplus to the dump, if they couldn't give them away. There were enough to go around forever and ever and ever, just like the carrier pigeon. Forty-five minutes is how long it took them to come by, because I remember that.

DS: Now they didn't want to go over land for fear of being shot at?

JU: No, it wasn't that. They were a salt water duck, the eiders, and they just wanted to stay over water as they went south. And so they'd come down the coast and they'd hit this hook, and as they followed the shore, the shore began to point back toward south Massachusetts. They'd go across and hit just

south of Plymouth and come around again. Keep on going. Eventually they'd settle on the water for the night. Then in the morning they'd get up and start flying again, and if the weather was good, they'd keep going around. They might stay in there for a week or ten days. And it was a sight. People would be down there, automobiles side by side, watching this black mass of ducks going by.

And while we're talking about those ducks not being around any more, Great Pond always had at least one pair of loons and I learned and eventually put to practice the fact that you could tell where a loon was going to come up when it dived by which way its beak was pointing. And if you watched it carefully and had a canoe or a rowboat, you could row to where it was going to come up and it would see you and dive again, but of course for a shorter time this time, and you could grab by the neck as it came up and you could flip this horrible, very very muscular flapping creature into the boat and smell the most rotten smell of rotten fish you could possibly imagine. And then you would let it go and it would flap off.

But there were loons.

DS: The loons are making a comeback in New Hampshire. I wonder if-- have you seen any down here?

JU: I did last year. There was a pair of them up at my end of the pond, but I think water skiers took care of that. But they'll come back. They're expanding again. But we would have

at least three pairs and maybe more of black ducks nesting on the pond. They're all gone.

In my day, when you trolled in Herring Pond or Long Pond or Great Pond for pickerel, you threw them over unless they weighed three pounds. It wasn't worthwhile to keep anything smaller than three pounds. And you'd catch at least one in a day.

DS: There were bass in Great Pond then. There may still be.

JU: As far as I know, there has never been a bass in Great Pond.

DS: Really!

JU: White perch, which are a bass, which are a member of the striped bass family, are in there, they're in there now, and people catch them and think they're bass.

DS: I remember a guy named Tom, who was sort of the cook and caretaker of the Great Pond Camp. He used to tell me he caught bass in Great Pond.

JU: He was catching white perch. And this is a thing that we ought to get straightened out. A white perch is a bass. A bass is a sunfish. A large mouth or small mouth bass is a member of the sunfish family, but the white perch is a true bass. It's a member of the striped bass family. And they come in after the herring. This time of year they're following the small fry of

herring going around. They're beautiful fighters and delicious to eat, and every visitor that comes down here that has fished inland waters and catches one, is sure he's got a bass. He hasn't. He's got a white perch. And they're a delicious fish to catch.

We've got that out of the way. I've got the pump and the kerosene, but I haven't got the Saturday night bath. I don't know how often you bathed, but when I was a kid, we bathed on Saturday night.

DS: Exactly. Saturday night.

JU: And when we bathed on Saturday night, we bathed in the kitchen, and when we bathed in the kitchen, we bathed in a tin tub which was painted green on the outside and a silvery color on the inside and was probably not more than three, three and a half feet long. The kids could sit in it. By the time I remember it, I had to stand in it and bathe, but I was bathed by the mother all the time that I was standing in a tub. I was young enough to be bathed.

And I can remember the too hot water, the too cold water, and I can remember Packer's tar soap in my hair. I can remember Ivory soap that floated. Then I remember, after having bathed and got dressed again, it was my job to mop the floor, because there wasn't any way to bathe in a tin tub-- the whole younger members of the family-- I don't know where the adults bathed. The young members of the family all bathed Saturday night in a

tin tub.

DS: I was next generation, just one removed. We had a bathtub. It had the claw legs. Big long thing. But my folks didn't have hot water connected up to it, so we would be bathed on Saturday night and us four boys-- there were only five years separating us-- so the four of us would line up in that bathtub and my mother would just wash us one after the other. First she had to lug the hot water up from downstairs. It was heated on the kitchen stove. That was just one step beyond what you were doing.

JU: I'll have to tell you, not for the Historical Society, but the fact-- my only experience of a big tub with claw legs which left it up off the floor was when we lived in New York on 53rd Street. Later the place was torn down for Rockefeller Center. But I came home one night slightly the worse for wear and went into the bathroom, which was also up on a sort of pedestal, and sat there sort of gazing around dully, waiting for the time to go to bed, and looked at the claws on the tub, got a silly grin on my face, got the nail polish off the thing and did all the nails, and then went to bed. And from then on nobody ever said anything. Every newcomer had to shriek once. So I remember bathtubs with claws, but not on Cape Cod.

The iron stove, the copper hot water thing, the fireless cooker, and the bread and the oatmeal, the garbage, the poles and the long-handed shovels-- and let me see what we have. Oh! When

I lived in Kinnikinnik of course I walked around all the ponds that could be walked around, and in the shallows just to the left of Kinnikinnik-- this would be the west-- are timbers about a foot square, still lying on the bottom, which are the remains of the old tannery. And they're still there. I could take you over with a rowboat and show them to you today.

DS: Now was this the tannery that Swift built?

JU: I don't know anything about it except that it did exist before my time. That's where it was and the timbers were there. I believe they used a lot of water in the process of tanning, which is why they had it out over the water. It was over Great Pond.

DS: That's interesting, because the windmill at one point was used to grind chestnut bark to make it finely divided so that it could be extracted for the tannin.

JU: For the tannin, yes.

DS: So that ties in there.

JU: Yes, it does. Well, actually I could take anybody out in a rowboat on a calm day and take them and point down and say, there's one of the foundation logs.

DS: This is on Great Pond, you say?

JU: On Great Pond and just west of where Kinnikinnik property is. On the land there is a basement, a very tall, very heavy vacated basement. High on one side and broken down on the other, to conform to the side of the hill, which may actually have been a part of the tannery. And I have sent historians there to look at it. I told Jim Owen about it and I'm sure he's looked.

DS: Now Swift was supposed to have operated a tannery in Eastham.

JU: I understand so and that may have been where.

DS: It was always referred to as in Thumpertown, but that's not Thumpertown, of course.

JU: It's certainly not Thumpertown. Well, my grandfather told me when I asked him what those logs were. He said, "Well, that's part of the old tannery." And he might have known, because-- I can date him for you too. I don't know when he was born, but I know when he was old enough to run around as a barefoot boy delivering papers, that he paid a penny for and sold for two cents to six or eight people. He had a regular route. Because he was doing that when the Civil War ended. And he bought all the papers that came in-- there must have been as many as a

dozen-- and sold them for a nickel. And that was the start of his entrepreneurial career.

I'll tell you about him too. He started, I think, with a pedlar's cart, peddling vegetables and fruit and so on, and eventually in Palmer, Mass., where my mother Edna was born, he had a fruit store, had a fruit and vegetable store. And he started it first with a line of credit. He went to a bank and borrowed a hundred dollars, which was easy enough to do, up to that amount. He went to another bank in town and borrowed a hundred dollars and the next day he paid off the first bank. He went to the third bank and paid off the second. Then paid the first bank and he had established credit in three banks and never had to give any kind of security the rest of the time he was there. This lousy hundred dollar borrowing.

He sent for oranges and lemons from Florida, and he told me about the time he was standing in a store, saw a man-- "Oh, Mr. Lorimer, Mr. Lorimer, I've just got some of the sweetest oranges

you have ever tasted in your life. Come in here. I think you might like a dozen of them."

So Mr. Lorimer would swerve from wherever he was going and come in, and-- "Just a minute. Let me show you something that you wouldn't believe." And he'd cut a lemon in half and say, "Taste this lemon for the flavor in it." And he'd taste the lemon. Then he'd take him back and let him taste an orange. [Laughter]

DS: Sweetest juice he's ever had!

JU: Yes. That's what's the matter. Let me see-- [consulting notes] the remains of the tannery under Great Pond.

The drive to Orleans. Now when you wanted supplies, you didn't go to George Clark's store and buy a five-pound bag of flour. You went to Orleans and you bought a barrel of flour, and you didn't replace it until the barrel was pretty darned low. You bought your sugar. It might be a small barrel or a keg, but you bought quantities. You bought quantities of anything that would keep-- potatoes, turnips, anything like that. And you put them in a root cellar to keep. You didn't have any other way of keeping them.

But this process was either weekly or every other week, and we would rent, I believe, Almond Nickerson's horse and cart, and we would drive to Orleans by Bridge Road. Bridge Road was sand all the way. Just two tracks for the wheels and one track for the horse, and it took an hour, because the horse walked. You'd

say, "Giddap," and he'd walk. You'd flick a fly off his tail and he'd walk. That was his speed. At four or five miles an hour, it took about an hour to get to Orleans. So we'd spend the day there. You'd have a lunch, which my grandmother or my mother would have packed. It would be a pretty copious picnic lunch too. And you'd sit by the gravestones in the center of town, while the men were shopping for hardware and the women were shopping for food. And you'd load up the wagon and back you'd come with it, and then the men would carry the heavy stuff in, the boys would carry the middle stuff.

But you shopped in Orleans. George Clark, you went up to buy a loaf of bread or a quart of milk.

DS: I wondered about that. My generation-- if I can say that-- was just one-- it's fascinating to me to see how things changed.

JU: I know. We're overlapping a little.

DS: By the time I came along, all these merchants were coming to the house. My mother rarely went to Orleans for anything, because you had Byron Holmes with the meat and George Wiley and Freddie Gill and Scurry Jack and Link Nickerson, and they supplied most of the things.

JU: Yeah, they made house calls. They made house calls with the meat, as I recall.

DS: Yes. Byron Holmes or Leon Chase.

JU: That's right. Now I'll have to tell you about going to the toilet. That wasn't quite as easy as it is today. In the first place we didn't have any mechanical toilets when I was growing up, but my grandfather built a shed on the west side of Kinnikinnik, across a wooden deck, and in there is where he had a gasoline pump that brought water up from the pond, with which to flush a chemical toilet down into a chemical tank. If you were on the second floor of Kinnikinnik and couldn't wait and had to go to the bathroom, you got out of bed barefoot, down the stairs, through the kitchen, across this wooden deck-- whether it was snowing or raining or whatever it was doing-- and go into the toilet.

But if you had a house guest and she was a portly woman, who didn't know about country facilities, you had a thunder jug under her bed. And when we had house guests, I was named Commodore. I was in charge of the vessels. It was my job to empty them each day and I got awfully sick of that for a woman who even wee-weed in it. This was really carrying it too far.

So I emptied a can of baking powder into the thunder jug, and I think everybody who was there still remembers that.
[Laughter] What a shriek she let out!

But you had two sizes of thunder jugs. You had the little thunder jug and you had the big tall one. And there was manufactured in those days-- I saw one, but not on the Cape-- the toilet seat that you see these days, but on long legs, which you

sat up over one of the tall thunder jugs, so that that cold porcelain wouldn't hit your fanny. You'd sit on warm wood.

DS: That was very elegant.

JU: I don't know when the total eclipse came, but I saw it back of Kinnikinnik, lying on my back on the dock looking up into the sky.

DS: Now I saw one in 1930 or something. About 1930, is that the one you're referring to?

JU: Might have been. Because I remember the gulls going to roost and the robins going to roost and then suddenly discovering it was day again.

DS: You had a piece of smoked glass to look at the sun?

JU: Yes. I told you that the cottage names were Indian. Kewaydin, Kanagwana, Kenozha, Kiwanis, Kenjockery.

END OF SESSION